

Memphis District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

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Listening and Learning

Regional EPA Administrator visits St. Johns Project

by Jim PogueChief, Public Affairs Office

The Memphis District hosted Environmental Protection Agency Region 7 Administrator Karl Brooks for a site visit to the St. Johns Bayou and New Madrid Floodway on Tuesday (Sept. 21). U.S. Congresswoman Jo Ann Emerson who represents southern Missouri's Eighth District, staffers representing Missouri Sen. Christopher Bond and Sen. Claire McCaskill, members of the St. Johns Levee and Drainage District and other local leaders also participated.



Jim Pogue photo

Karl Brooks (arm outstretched) asks questions of Project Manager Danny Ward (right) during a stop at the St. Johns gravity outlet structure.

"Mr. Brooks' visit gave us structure.

a great opportunity to show him and his staff the project and to discuss its many challenges face to face and on the ground," Memphis District Project Manager Danny Ward said. "He (Mr. Brooks) asked lots of questions and heard in person from the people who are directly impacted by the persistent area flooding."

This flood risk management project is located in southeast Missouri and calls for channel modifications, two pumping stations, and the closure of a 1,500-foot gap at the southern end of the floodway levee.

First authorized in 1954, funding shortfalls and later



Jim Pogue photo

Left to right, Memphis District Commander Col. Vernie Reichling, Jr., Environmental team leader Gregg Williams and Administrator Karl Brooks at Big Oak Tree State Park.

environmental concerns delayed construction until 2006.

Then in 2007 the U.S. District Court ordered the Corps to halt construction and restore the site to its original condition.

As the District worked to restore the construction site, leaders also determined to prepare a new Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

"We have expanded the Independent External Peer Review process to our formulation and have conducted extensive interagency coordination to

ensure methodologies are scientifically sound to support agency decision making," Ward said.

The interagency coordination piece of the solution is what brought Mr. Brooks to the Missouri bootheel on Tuesday.

A caravan of vehicles left the New Madrid, Mo., riverfront at about 8:15 a.m. Stops followed at the St. Johns gravity outlet structure and levee closure restoration site, Big Oak Tree State Park, the community of Pinhook then lunch in East Prairie, Mo.

There, local leaders from both Pinhook and East Prairie spoke passionately about the physical and psychological damage frequent flooding has caused over the decades.



Jim Pogue photo

The survey boat Tiger Shark underway.

The day ended with a Mississippi River tour of batture lands (alluvial land between the river at low-water stage and levees) near Donaldson Point aboard the survey boats Hydronet and Tiger Shark.

Site restoration is currently scheduled for completion in October 2010 and the new draft EIS is scheduled for 2012.

If you would like to comment about this article, please email Jim Pogue or Cheryl Ramsey.







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